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Tutorial: Six Steps to XP Upgrade Success

Here are six things to remember in preparing for a successful Windows XP migration

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Whether with a new kid or a new computer operating system, a proud parent should always expect a few teething problems. And in the latter case, tasks such as a Windows XP installation can cause much frustration. While the operating system itself is built to be more user-friendly and easier to install and implement, Windows is becoming increasingly sophisticated -- and users often just aren't technical enough to deal with anything more than basic troubleshooting. Just as most motorists today don't know how to fix high-tech in-car navigation systems, most computer users usually need an extra hand.

The release of Microsoft Corp.'s Windows XP operating system brought with it great amounts of hope, and hype. For some users with long memories and poor prior experiences, the system also brought a great amount of fear and trepidation.

While the promise of the abolition of the dreaded fatal-error blue screen made this release attractive to many users, the fears of installing a new untested Windows operating system may cause you to think twice about doing the upgrade yourself. But with a little preparation, most users should be able to get through it on their own without needing to do anything more than basic troubleshooting. Here's what it takes.

- **Check your hardware** You need a computer with at least a 300-MHz CPU and 128MB of RAM. (Microsoft's minimum recommendation is a 233-MHz machine with 64MB of RAM).
- **Check out your ISP** If you're using a PC for Internet connectivity, check with your Internet service provider to ensure that it can provide support for Windows XP. Many ISPs don't yet support it. If you go ahead and install the new system and then have problems with connectivity, you may not be able to get ISP support.
- **Uninstall antivirus software** Do this before running the Windows XP installation program. Antivirus software runs in the background and can cause complications that you won't be able to see, conflicting with Windows XP's installation procedures. To completely eliminate the chance of a conflict, *uninstall* the software rather than simply disabling it. (But be sure to reinstall the antivirus software upon the completion of the Windows XP installation process.)

- **Prepare your drivers** Although you *can* install generic drivers in an upgrade process, it's worth getting all the specific XP-related drivers for your peripherals and hardware devices. The most important devices to upgrade are modems and printers, as they can cause the biggest problems after an installation. Having the current drivers for all of these devices will help eliminate many system problems.
- **Define user profiles carefully** After installing Windows XP, users often call tech support because they can't find or access certain programs. Typically, those programs aren't accessible to the user because he's logged in under a user profile that doesn't provide access to those programs. If you're the only user on a system, be sure to assign yourself the user admin rights to the whole system, which will provide access to all programs. Since the user profiles may be unfamiliar at first, try logging in under a different profile to look for missing programs and then change your setting from limited use to administrative.
- **Use the Windows help system** Users often assume that their problem can't be fixed by reading the help files. In fact, Windows XP includes very good tutorials. The review videos -- which many users don't even know about -- are especially helpful with setting up user profiles, for example. So once you have the operating system installed, take some time to review the help system. Microsoft has provided several troubleshooting files that should make some of those support calls unnecessary. One note, however: While some help information is available before the installation is complete, Windows XP must be fully installed before you can access the help videos.

With online help, telephone support and the advice programmed into the operating system itself, there's no reason to be scared about a do-it-yourself upgrade to Windows XP. And any teething problems users might experience further down the line, once everything is up and running, should be pretty comfortable to fix as well.

A new car, with its different controls and style, takes a bit of time to get used to, but most of us will put up with that to get the added speed, the new trimmings and the overall look.

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